

PM: How Japan can represent E. Asia

15 JAN 1993

By WONG CHUN WAL

KUALA LUMPUR: Japan will be able to represent East Asian countries more forcefully if they meet before it attends the Group of Seven summit.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said at present, Japan was the only East Asian country in the powerful group of seven developed nations.

He said it would be much better and more representative of Japan if a meeting of East Asian countries was held to identify common problems and take a consensual stand.

"The Japanese Prime Minister would then be able to represent the East Asian countries more forcefully.

"This again should prove the usefulness of the EAEC," he said at a dinner in honour of Japanese Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa at Sri Perdana yesterday.

Other G-7 members are the United States, Germany, France, Britain, Italy and Canada.

Dr Mahathir said the Japanese Prime Minister had made it a practice to get the views of East Asian countries before attending a G-7 meeting.

"This is very welcomed. But since the views were given without prior consultation, it is more than likely that conflicting views will be expressed," he said.

He said the subjects, too, might differ and as a result, Japanese intervention at the group's meeting would not be as effective.

Speaking at length on the East Asia Economic

Caucus, Dr Mahathir said there was a tendency to think of regional groupings as a trade bloc.

"I would like to point out that Asean, one of the most successful regional groupings, has been around for almost a quarter of a century without becoming a trade bloc"

The EAEC, he said, was to be a mere forum of countries in close geographical proximity which shared common economic ambitions and problems.

A forum of these East Asian countries would enable them to come together to discuss these common problems and to decide on their stand.

Dr Mahathir said countries belonging to the EAEC were bound to learn from each other the right approach to economic development and help each other through investments and access to each other's markets.

In a reference to Japan's approach to the EAEC, Dr Mahathir said he fully appreciated Japan's position.

"I merely want to explain that the EAEC is not a trade bloc. It is only a regional forum," he said.

On Asean, he said many member countries, including Malaysia, were now able to provide assistance to and share their experiences with other South-East Asian neighbours recovering from years of conflict and economic stagnation.

Dr Mahathir also said Malaysia held Japan in high esteem and admiration for its success in rebuilding itself from the ashes of the Second World War and emerging as the leading economic power in the world.